

LACTATION SUITES ON GROWTH TRAJECTORY

ABOUT LECHE LOUNGE. Based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Leche Lounge manufactures lactation suites. Federal labor laws require employers to provide a private space for lactating mothers to pump breast milk at work, and a 2010 amendment requires that employees also have break time for pumping. The high-design pumping spaces help corporations comply with federal laws while offering comfort to users and value to customers. Stephanie Conduff founded the company three years ago and now employs about a dozen people.

THE CHALLENGE. A few years ago, Stephanie Conduff had a product idea that would help hundreds of businesses follow labor laws, and potentially create a more loyal workforce. Conduff gave birth to her daughter while still attending law school and was forced to pump breast milk in bathrooms. She envisioned a suite space designed for nursing mothers that included hospital-grade breast pumps, locked doors for privacy, and insulation for comfort and to mask the sound of pumping. The stations needed to be suitable for a corporate environment, but affordable enough for small businesses. Conduff made two attempts with contract manufacturers to produce the lactation suites, but neither could meet the specifications she required. She was about to give up when a fellow business owner recommended she contact David Wheeler, a manufacturing extension agent with the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance, an NIST MEP affiliate.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Wheeler sat down with Conduff and examined her manufacturing requirements. He used his knowledge of the Oklahoma industrial landscape to introduce her to Bruce Parks, owner of Parks Custom Cabinets in Chelsea, Oklahoma, and a Cherokee citizen. High on Conduff's wish list was partnering with a minority-owned manufacturer. She knew there was an opportunity for government contracts to provide the lactation suites for military bases. As a small, woman-owned, Native American-owned business, Leche Lounge earns a leg up on the competitive bidding process. Parks produced a prototype that exceeded Conduff's expectations and the two quickly pushed the Leche Lounge suites into production. Sales have taken off and the venture is now a full-fledged enterprise. While there is no real market competition at the moment, Wheeler anticipates challenges to the company's success. He is working with Conduff to make sure the manufacturing process is as efficient as possible to reduce her bottom line. He is also working with her on top-line issues like continuous innovation to stay ahead of potential competitors. Leche Lounge is exploring new, non-traditional markets and adding jobs.

"With the help of the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance, we are creating social change and helping empower women to meet their unique challenges. To do that while creating jobs in northeastern Oklahoma is the perfect synergy."

-Stephanie Conduff, Owner

RESULTS



\$300,000 in new sales



8 new jobs



\$75,000 in annual cost savings



\$100,000 investment

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